



Bush, R., & Krishnan, M. (2016). Introduction: Print activism in Twenty-First-Century Africa. *Wasafiri*, 31(4), 1-2.  
<https://doi.org/10.1080/02690055.2016.1216267>

Peer reviewed version

Link to published version (if available):  
[10.1080/02690055.2016.1216267](https://doi.org/10.1080/02690055.2016.1216267)

[Link to publication record in Explore Bristol Research](#)  
PDF-document

This is the author accepted manuscript (AAM). The final published version (version of record) is available online via Taylor and Francis at <http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/02690055.2016.1216267>. Please refer to any applicable terms of use of the publisher

## University of Bristol - Explore Bristol Research

### General rights

This document is made available in accordance with publisher policies. Please cite only the published version using the reference above. Full terms of use are available:  
<http://www.bristol.ac.uk/pure/about/ebr-terms>

**Editorial: Print Activism in Twenty-First-Century Africa**  
**By Ruth Bush and Madhu Krishnan**

This Special Issue explores continuities and discontinuities in activist print cultures in Africa and the African diaspora. Our initial spark was the fiftieth anniversary of the UK's first black bookshop and publishing house, New Beacon Books (founded in London in 1966). New Beacon's radical activism emerged in part from the Caribbean labour movement in the 1930s, Marxist and third-worldist politics of the 1950s and 1960s and the complex interventions which have shaped racial politics in Britain since the 1960s. Its founders expressed deep commitment to the potential of print to build solidarity across borders and between generations. New Beacon's work has been the subject of a recent exhibition ('Dream to Change the World') which foregrounds the life and legacy of the publishing house's cofounder, John La Rose, here recorded in reviews by Margaret Busby and Louisa Olufsen Layne.

We sought in this issue to signal pathways that link from those important heritage initiatives to current trends in African and African diasporic book publishing; pathways marked by an enduring fidelity to print as a means of exchanging ideas. Where bookshops and independent publishers such as New Beacon and Bogle L'Ouverture in London, Présence Africaine in Paris or Third World Press in Chicago once flourished as hubs for political and intellectual thought, the digital mediascape now provides unprecedented space and means for raising oppositional voices and forming complex communities of writers and readers. Articles in this issue by Kate Wallis, Nathalie Carré and Stephanie Bosch Santana point to the transnational networks that sustain new independent print initiatives, ranging from Kwani? magazine in Kenya and Chimurenga in South Africa, to online platforms such as Afrilivres and the African Books Collective. We are particularly delighted in this context to have brought together writers, poets and translators whose work has been supported by the publishers celebrated in the issue. These include Meryvn Morris, whose first collection, *The Pond*, was published by New Beacon Books in 1963; Felwine Sarr, co-founder of Jimsaan Publishing house in Senegal; Efemia Chela, Dorothea Smartt and Nick Makoha, whose work has been supported in the past by Wasafiri's own print activism; and poets Daouda Ndiaye and Ola Nwaozuzu-Ekechukwu, whose poetry is translated from Wolof and Igbo respectively.

Print activism also depends on readers. The current global revolution in reading practices, with seemingly constant shifts between page and screen, between material and immaterial print culture, has wide-ranging consequences for the politics and aesthetics of literary production. There is a related recurrent questioning of how we read; a questioning which is certainly not new, but which has found broader geographical and theoretical scope over the past fifteen years. This is seen in recent Special Issues of established magazines, including the one in your hands (see Fraser and Nasta), newer zines such as OOMK (see Niazi, Nordin and Lamara) and the expanding body of academic scholarship on global book history (see Hofmeyr; Suarez and Wooudhuysen). We aim here to supplement that burgeoning body of work by mapping and investigating the contemporary African publishing landscape.

On the African continent, where book production has long been blighted by obstacles of distribution and access, digital media might be seen as a panacea. Equally, the

question of the digital brings with it recurrent anxieties around unequal access, patterns of distribution and hierarchies of information production which continue to mark the publishing world. In our attempt to gauge this shifting material landscape in which independent publishing operates, we include here the voices of eighteen publishers based across the African continent (from Cameroon, Guinea, Kenya, Nigeria, Tanzania, Senegal, South Africa, Uganda, Sierra Leone, Tunisia and Zimbabwe) in questionnaires and interviews gathered by Emma Shercliff, Mary Jay and Raphaël Thierry. These give a glimpse of the energy surrounding current African literary production in English, French and African languages. Amid their achievements, these publishers also signal the concrete challenges they face. Their books are available internationally via the online platforms mentioned above and we strongly encourage you to visit those websites and consider including their work in your future reading plans.

Bundles of blue airmail letters and Gestetner-printed political pamphlets in the New Beacon archive signify the lived experience of transnational print activism in the twentieth century. That intricate network of human relationships and constant crafting of ideas remain crucial. Yet words, thought, action and reaction are now at a different pace and a different pitch, pointing towards new forms and new media for political intervention. Siobhán Shilton's essay on Tunisian video art in the wake of the so-called 'Arab Spring' highlights this mobilisation of different forms through its emphasis on visuality and the aesthetics of contingency. Throughout the issue we have sought to balance palpable optimism and an open sense of expressive possibility with an updated understanding of the material realities of print activism on the African continent.

We would like to warmly thank Rebecca Gibbs, Jamie Carstairs, Ranka Primorac, Claire Ducournau, Georgina Collins, Claire Wadie and Emma La Fontaine Jackson for their help and support in producing this Special Issue. Our home institution, the University of Bristol, also offered financial support for the organisation of a publishers' workshop and writers' event in April 2016 which continues to feed into these conversations and new collaborations with the Writivism pan-African literary initiative.

#### Works Cited

- Fraser, R and S Nasta, ed. *The Book in the World*. Spec. Issue of *Wasafiri* 22.3 no. 52 (2007).
- Hofmeyr, I. *Gandhi's Printing Press: Experiments in Slow Reading*. Boston, MA: Harvard UP, 2013.
- Niazi, S, R Nordin and H Lamara, ed. *Print*. Spec. Issue of *OOMK* 3 (2013). Accessed 10 June 2016 <<http://www.oomk.net>>.
- Suarez, M F and H R Wooudhuysen, ed. *The Book. A Global History*. Oxford: OUP, 2014.